

Albert Gallatin Jenkins: 10

Jenkins' Crucial Test To Win Congress Nomination

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of articles on the life of the late Albert Gallatin Jenkins, which will appear in the chapters of a biography which Congressman Jenkins is preparing.)

By CONGRESSMAN KEN HECHLER

With only a few weeks of rest after the strenuous 1854 presidential campaign, Albert Gallatin Jenkins set forth for Parkersburg in what was to prove a crucial test of his career.

Meeting in Parkersburg on Dec. 4, 1854, was the Democratic Congressional Convention to choose the man who was to run against Congressman John S. Carlile in the general election — scheduled in those days at the peculiar time of the fourth Thursday in May in odd-numbered years. The Cabell County delegates to the Parkersburg conclave included John Morris, E. Rickets, C. Shumons, Isaac Omg, David Kirkpatrick and A. G. Jenkins himself.

Jenkins was not an avowed candidate when the convention opened. In fact, when F. P. Turner of Jackson County nominated B. W. Jackson of Wood County for the seat, the seconding speech was made by young Jenkins. Among others placed in nomination were J. M. Bennett of Lewis County; Samuel L. Hays of Gilmer County; James H. Brown of Kanawha County; and Charles S. Lewis of Harrison County who had been narrowly defeated by Congressman Carlile in the congressional election of 1855.

District Tremendously Large

The 11th Congressional District of Virginia was a tremendously large district in pre-Civil War days. It stretched from Cabell and Putnam counties on the south, northward to Wood and eastward as far as Harrison and Randolph counties, anchoring back to Kanawha County in the center. A total of 19 counties polling up to 15,000 votes were included in the sprawling district.

The counties were allocated votes in the convention in proportion to their votes in the preceding election. This was designed as a stimulus to get out the vote at election time. The delegate votes added up to 9,483 in the convention, with 4,744 necessary for a choice.

When the roll was called for the first ballot in the race for the nomination, the leader was J. M. Bennett of Lewis County. The following are the totals for the first two ballots:

| | 1st | 2nd |
|---------|-------|-------|
| Bennett | 2,419 | 2,589 |
| Jackson | 2,008 | 2,164 |
| Lewis | 1,728 | 1,820 |
| Brown | 1,696 | 1,896 |
| Hays | 1,746 | 861 |

Bennett continued to gain until the sixth ballot when he reached his high water-mark of 3,105. Hays, who withdrew after his poor showing on the second ballot, was renominated after the eighth ballot and immediately shot into the lead with 2,447 to Bennett's 2,230. On the tenth ballot it was Hays's turn to slip downward to 1,644 while Bennett was rising to 2,408. On the 11th ballot the count stood as follows:

| | |
|---------|-------|
| Bennett | 2,979 |
| Jackson | 2,447 |
| Hays | 2,183 |
| Brown | 2,010 |

On the 12th ballot, Hays suddenly rose again and scored the

largest vote yet garnered in the convention: 3,002.

Jenkins Is Nominated

Now came the chance for the young lawyer from Cabell County. Jenkins' name was placed in nomination with dramatic suddenness by F. P. Turner of Jackson County. At the same time, Robert Johnston of Harrison County was placed in nomination. The 13th and 14th ballots went as follows:

| | 13th | 14th |
|----------|-------|-------|
| Bennett | 3,407 | 3,452 |
| Jenkins | 3,013 | 3,237 |
| Hays | 1,751 | 2,795 |
| Johnston | 893 | |

Although his vote dropped on the 15th ballot to 3,143, the 15th was the first ballot showing Jenkins in the lead, but close on his heels was Charles S. Lewis, the man for whom Jenkins had campaigned so hard in 1855 against John S. Carlile. Now the seething which Jenkins had received at the national convention in 1855 came to his rescue at this crucial point. Realizing that his own strength had slipped 90 votes, and that there was a considerably unified sentiment in support of the "old favorite," Lewis, who had come so close to victory in 1855, Jenkins maneuvered for an adjournment to line up his forces anew. He successfully rounded up enough support for adjournment until Saturday, Dec. 6 at 9 a. m.

Work For Support

Jenkins and his Cabell County supporters worked feverishly throughout the period the convention was in recess, and were up nearly all night before the Saturday session. They used every means to sway the Harrison County supporters of Lewis, for whom Jenkins had done so much in 1855. On the 16th ballot, Jenkins established a commanding lead for the first time, rolling up 4,360 votes, only 384 short of a choice, while Bennett scored 3,336 and Lewis dropped to 2,343. Sensing victory, the Jenkins group tried to put it over but they had shot their bolt for the time being and on the 18th ballot Jenkins slumped to 3,032. But on the 19th ballot Jenkins slumped to 3,032. But on the 19th, he recovered to 3,758.

Rejects First Nomination

By this time, the tired balloters had passed a rule that the low man on each ballot should be dropped. The race was down to Jenkins and William L. Jackson of Wood County (later a Confederate general.) B. W. Jackson, the man Jenkins had seconded for the nomination, then made an impassioned address to the divided and angry delegates, urging them to sink their differences and get behind Jenkins. There were roars of boos mixed with applause as William L. Jackson of Wood withdrew, and the chairman of the convention announced that Albert Gallatin Jenkins had been nominated by default, there being no competition for the nomination against him.

Now the true mettle of Jenkins shone through. Calmly and deliberately this son of Greenbottom rose to his feet, faced the torn and divided convention, and in a clear and loud voice announced that he would decline to recognize any nomination in this manner.

Taken somewhat aback by this sudden renunciation of the prize within the candidate's grasp, the convention subsequently let out a warwhoop of unanimity when F. P. Turner moved that Jenkins be nominated by acclamation.

It was a perfect psychological stroke for the moment, and it gained for Albert Gallatin Jenkins not only the nomination for the House of Representatives, but a united and determined party, stirred by his leadership and parliamentary skill.